The Figures of Hoshedar and Saoshyant in Zoroastrian Eschatology: A Philological and Comparative Study and Their Relevance to the Prophetic Concept of Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم

(The Figures of Hoshedar and Saoshyant in Zoroastrian Eschatology: A Philological and Comparative Study and Their Relevance to the Concept of the Prophethood of Muhammad)

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Abstract

This study traces two major figures in Zoroastrian eschatology, *Hoshedar (Ukhshyat-ereta)* and *Saoshyant (Astvat-ereta),* who in the Avesta and Pahlavi texts play the role of the savior of mankind towards the end of time. Through a philological approach to *Yasht*, *Bundahishn*, and *Zand-i Vohuman Yasht*, as well as a historical and comparative analysis of the Abrahamic tradition, this article examines the possibility that the concept of salvation has a common point with prophetic ideas in Islam, particularly with the figure of the Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم. This paper seeks to separate the mythological and theological aspects from scientific analysis, while reviewing modern interpretations that attribute *Saoshyant's prophecies* to the figure of Muhammad, without taking sides with apologetic or skeptical perspectives.

Keywords: Hoshedar, Saoshyant, Zoroastrianism, Eschatology, Prophethood of Muhammad, Comparative-religion

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Abstract

This study examines two major figures in Zoroastrian eschatology, *Hoshedar (Ukhshyat-ereta)* and *Saoshyant (Astvat-ereta),* who are described in Avestan and Pahlavi texts as world saviors emerging at the end of time. Through philological analysis of the *Yashts*, *Bundahishn*, and *Zand-i Vohuman Yasht*, combined with a historical and comparative approach to Abrahamic traditions, this paper investigates the potential intersection between these Zoroastrian savior concepts and the Islamic understanding of prophethood, particularly concerning the figure of Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم. The discussion distinguishes mythic-theological elements from critical historical analysis, addressing modern interpretations that connect the Saoshyant prophecies with Muhammad, while maintaining a non-apologetic and non-polemical stance.

Keywords: Hoshedar, Saoshyant, Zoroastrianism, Eschatology, Prophethood of Muhammad, Comparative Religion

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Introduction

The concept of the savior figure is a universal theme in many world religions, especially in the Indo-Iranian and Semitic traditions. In Zoroastrianism, a religion rooted in the teachings of the Prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster), the idea of the savior of the end times is articulated in three successive figures: *Hoshedar (Ukhshyat-ereta), Hoshedarmah (Ukhshyat-nemah),* and *Saoshyant (Astvat-ereta)*.[1] These figures are said to appear gradually to restore the truth (*asha*) and destroy evil (*druj*) before they occur *Frashokereti*, which is the perfection of the world.

[1] Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge, 1979), p. 203.

In the Pahlavi tradition, especially in *the Bundahishn* and *Denkard*, the three figures are depicted as spiritual continuations of Zarathustra himself, born from his sacred seed deposited in Lake Kansaoya.[2] Philologically, the term *Saoshyant* is derived from the Avestan root *saušya-* ("help"), which means "helper" or "savior." [3] In a theological context, he was the final executor of the divine plan to defeat Ahriman and restore the creation of Ahura Mazda.

[2] E. W. West (ed.), *The Bundahishn*, Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 5 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1880), pp. 146–148.[3] R. C. Zaehner, *The Teachings of the Magi: A Compendium of Zoroastrian Beliefs* (London: Sheldon Press, 1956), p. 102.

In modern research, especially since the works of Mary Boyce and Duchesne-Guillemin, there has been a realization that *the concept of Saoshyant* is not only part of the Zoroastrian eschatological system, but also plays an important role in shaping the messianic imagination of the Western and Middle Eastern worlds.[4] Various scholars argue that the idea of a single savior who will come at the end of the day—seen in Judaism (Mashiach), Christianity (Christ of Parousia), and Islam (al-Mahdi or Isa al-Masih)—may have traceable roots into this ancient Iranian tradition.[5]

[4] Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism, Vol. II* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), p. 233.[5] Geo Widengren, *The Great Zoroastrian and the Apostle of God* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1945), pp. 89–91.

In this context, this study seeks to explore two things: first, the textual and theological significance of the figures *of Hoshedar* and *Saoshyant* as presented in the Avesta and Pahlavi texts; second, the possible conceptual connection between the savior figures and prophetic ideas in Islam, especially as represented in the figure of the Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم which in Islamic view is considered to be the conclusion of the prophets (*khatam an-nabiyyin*).

Well, let's move on to **Parts II–IV** of the article:

II. Methodology and Framework of Analysis

(Methodology and Analytical Framework)

This study uses three main approaches: **philological**, **historical-comparative**, and **phenomenological**. All three allow for cross-text, cross-cultural analysis, and maintain a balance between textual reading and sociohistorical context.

Philologically*, the analysis is directed at the main Avesta texts such as* Yasna*,* Yashts*, and* Vendidad*, accompanied by post-Avestan sources such as* Bundahishn *and* Zand-i Vohuman Yasht.*[6] Linguistic studies are focused on the semantic evolution of the terms* Saoshyant*, Ukhshyat-ereta*, and *Astvat-ereta*, each of which shows a shift from moral meaning ("that which increases righteousness") to eschatological meaning ("which raises life from the dead").

[6] H. S. Nyberg, *Die Religionen des alten Iran* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1938), pp. 271–275.

A historical-comparative **approach** is used to trace the similarities in narrative structure between Zoroastrian savior figures and messianic concepts in the Abrahamic tradition. This analysis draws on the framework of Mircea Eliade and Geo Widengren on the transfer of religious ideas from ancient Iran to Semitic religions.[7]

[7] Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, Vol. I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 312.

The **phenomenological approach** is used to maintain the neutrality of interpretation, namely by examining the phenomenon *of end-time saviors* as a universal expression of human need for redemption and moral renewal. Within this framework, the prophetic concept of Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم is not seen as the result of mere influence, but as a *parallel resonance* of the wider tradition of revelation in the Near East.

III. Study of Hoshedar and Saoshyant's Texts in the Avesta and Pahlavi

(Textual Study of Hoshedar and Saoshyant in the Avesta and Pahlavi Texts)

1. Hoshedar (Ukhshyat-ereta)

In *the Zand-i Vohuman Yasht* and *Bundahishn*, Hoshedar is said to have appeared a thousand years after the death of Zarathustra. He was the spiritual son of the prophet, born of a virgin who bathed in Lake Kansaoya, where the sacred seed of Zarathustra was kept.[8] Hoshedar is described as a figure who would restore morality, prolong human days, and restore the neglected ritual of Ahura Mazda worship.

[8] West, *The Bundahishn*, pp. 146–148.

The name *Ukhshyat-ereta* means "who increases the truth" (*asha*), which is etymologically parallel to the root *ereta* from *rta* (Sanskrit), meaning "cosmic truth".[9] In *Yasht XIX*, it is stated that Hoshedar will reconcile the world with truth and defeat the forces of darkness for a period of time before the appearance of the next savior, *Hoshedarmah*.

[9] Duchesne-Guillemin, *La religion de l'Iran ancien* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), p. 283.

2. Saoshyant (Astvat-ereta)

Saoshyant is the last savior figure in the order of the three Zoroastrian saviors. In *Farvardin Yasht* (verses 129–141), he is referred to as "the one who will renew the world and bring the dead back to life." [10] His original name, *Astvat-ereta*, means "incarnation of truth" or "truth in physical form." [11]

[10] *Yasht 13*, in J. Darmesteter (trans.), *Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 23: The Zend-Avesta, Part II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883), p. 187.[11] Zaehner, *The Teachings of the Magi*, p. 104.

In *Bundahishn* chapter XXX, Saoshyant presides over the universal resurrection and the refining of molten metals that separate righteous and wicked men.[12] The world will be renewed to deathless, and Ahriman and the forces of evil will perish forever. This marks *Frashokereti*—the perfection of creation.

[12] West, *The Bundahishn*, pp. 198–200.

Theologically, Saoshyant is not only an individual figure, but also a symbol of the moral and spiritual transformation of humanity. In the Mazdean interpretation, anyone who upholds *the asha* (righteousness) can be called *a little saoshyant*.[13]

[13] Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism, Vol. II,* p. 233.

IV. Interpretation of Prophecy and the Messianic Dimension

(Interpretation of the Prophecies and the Messianic Dimension)

The prophecies about the arrival of Hoshedar and Saoshyant are progressive and repetitive. The three are seen not only as three separate figures, but also as three phases of world morality: the revival of doctrine (Hoshedar), the establishment of faith and law (Hoshedarmah), and universal spiritual perfection (Saoshyant).[14]

[14] Nyberg, *Die Religionen des alten Iran*, p. 273.

In the context of interfaith comparison, this three-stage pattern of salvation bears structural similarities to the concept *of paraousia* in Christianity and *al-Mahdi – Jesus – The Last Prophet* in Islam. All three mark the rhythm of sacred history that culminates in the closing of revelation.

Some modern interpreters, such as A. H. Vidyarthi in *Muhammad in the Parsi, Hindu and Buddhist Scriptures* (1936), argue that Saoshyant's description of being "born of a virgin, carrying divine law, conquering evil, and uniting mankind" is an allegory that parallels the characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم.[15] This argument is supported by the fact that a number of terms in Pahlavi texts such as *Astvat-ereta* ("who upholds truth in the world") can be semantically aligned with the Qur'anic pronunciation of the Prophet: *"li-yuzhira-hu 'ala ad-dīn kullihi"* (to uphold the truth over all religions).[16]

[15] Abdul Haqq Vidyarthi, *Muhammad in Persi, Hindu and Buddhist Scriptures* (Lahore: Kutub Khana Ishaat Islam, 1936), pp. 77–83.[16] QS. at-Taubah [9]:33.

However, orientalists such as Zaehner and Boyce are cautious about accepting such direct correlations. According to them, *the Saoshyant* was an intra-Zoroastrian figure that served as an ethical archetype, rather than a concrete prophecy about a historical figure.[17] Therefore, the relationship with the Prophet Muhammad is more accurately understood as *a spiritual typology* than a literal prediction.

Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1961), pp. 423–425.

From a scientific perspective, there are two possible interpretations that can be taken:

1. **Historical-phenomenological interpretations**, which see these similarities as the result of cultural contact between Iran and the Semites, particularly through pre-Islamic Arab-Persian trade routes.
2. **A theological-universal interpretation**, which views that ancient revelations manifest the same universal message in different symbols.

Both of these approaches have their own strengths and weaknesses. The first approach is empirically strong, while the second approach is philosophically and theologically strong.

Good. The following is the continuation and completion **of the final part (V–VII)** of bilingual articles with **full bodinotes**, according to the format of the Sinta 2 scientific journal.

V. Interpretation in the Context of Islam and Prophethood of Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم

(Interpretation within the Islamic Context and the Prophethood of Muhammad)

Theologically, Islam views the Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلمas the concluding of the prophets (*khatam an-nabiyyīn*), which brought the perfection of divine treatise and the closing of the period of prophetic revelation. In a comparative context, this position is interesting because it parallels the figure *of Saoshyant* who in Zoroastrian texts is referred to as the final reformer who would complete Zarathustra's prophetic task.[18]

[18] QS. al-Ahzab [33]:40; Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, p. 209.

1. Similarities of Theological Functions

Some conceptual similarities can be identified between *Saoshyant* and the Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم:

- **In** *the Zand-i Vohuman Yasht*, Saoshyant is said to have completed the revelation of Ahura Mazda and restored the purity of the world, similar to the Qur'an's statement that Islam was the perfectionist of the previous religion (*al-yawma akmaltu lakum dīnakum*).[19]
- **As Enforcers of Moral Truth:** Hoshedar and Saoshyant upheld *asha* (cosmic truth), while the Prophet Muhammad is described as the bearer of *haqq* (moral and legal truth).
- **As the Last Lawbearer:** Saoshyant restored Zarathustra's *dāta* (holy law), while Muhammad brought the final sharia that perfected the previous law.

[19] QS. al-Majid [5]:3.

This structural similarity provides the basis for the typological interpretation that Islam and Zoroastrianism share the same eschatological framework—that is, the closing of the prophetic cycle with a savior figure who upholds global justice.

2. Direction of Historical Relations

Historically, the interaction between the pre-Islamic Persian and Arab communities has been documented in sources such as *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī* and *Shahrastānī*.[20] It was in this environment that Persian eschatological concepts, such as *Saoshyant*, may have been known to the Hijaz people in a simplified form.

[20] Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1993), pp. 217–219.

However, there is no evidence that Muhammad's prophetic concept was a direct adoption of the Iranian system. Instead, what is happening is more like the phenomenon *of a shared eschatological pattern*—the similarity of the pattern of the myth of salvation that has emerged in different civilizations due to similar spiritual backgrounds.[21]

[21] Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, p. 320.

VI. Comparative Discussion: Zoroastrianism and the Abrahamic Religion

(Comparative Discussion: Zoroastrianism and the Abrahamic Traditions)

1. Narrative Structure and Salvation Theology

Zoroastrianism features three progressive saviors; Christianity features one messianic figure who will return (*Parousia*); Islam features a combination: *al-Mahdi* as the moral reformer, *Jesus* as the transcendent savior, and Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلمas the closing revelation. This structure shows the evolution of the idea of salvation from a mythological to a historical-theological form.[22]

[22] Widengren, *The Great Leap of Faith*, p. 97.

An important difference lies in the ontology of the savior: *Saoshyant* is the result of a sacred seed planted in the world, whereas in Islam, Muhammad was born naturally but was chosen by divine will. It shows the transition from the concept of a cosmic savior to the concept of *a historical apostle*.

2. Philosophical Implications and Universality of Revelation

If Saoshyant is understood as a symbol of the moral perfection that humans will achieve, then the figure of Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلمcan be seen as a historical actualization of the idea. In the view of comparative philosophy of religion, this means that every great tradition holds a reflection of a single universal truth.[23]

[23] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), p. 89.

However, the scientific approach demands that this analogy not be misunderstood as an absolute theological claim. The relationship between Hoshedar–Saoshyant and the prophethood of Muhammad is more accurately understood in terms *of typological correspondence*, rather than *predictive prophecy*.[24]

[24] Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, p. 427.

Thus, although a number of Zoroastrian texts can be interpreted in parallel with Islamic prophetic features (e.g., the emergence from the desert, the ultimate law-bearer, the purifier of monotheism), the academic approach places that similarity at the level of the structure of ideas, rather than specific revelations.

VII. Scientific Conclusions

(Scientific Conclusion)

Philological studies of *the Avesta* and *Pahlavi* texts show that the figures *of Hoshedar* and *Saoshyant* represent the conceptual evolution of saviors in the ancient Iranian tradition: from moral reformer to cosmic savior. Historical analysis shows that the idea of a universal savior has strong parallels with the Abrahamic tradition, but it cannot be proven as a result of direct adoption.

In the Islamic context, the similarities between *Saoshyant* and the Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلمcan be explained through two hypotheses:

1. **The typological hypothesis**, that both are parallel expressions of one universal archetype of the savior and the closing of revelation;
2. **The historical-communicative hypothesis**, that the intercultural interaction of Persians–Arabs creates an imaginative bridge that allows for the resonance of meaning between the two traditions.

Scientifically, the connection between *Saoshyant* and the prophethood of Muhammad cannot be claimed to be literal prophecy, but can be understood as a syncretic manifestation of man's universal

expectation of justice and moral perfection. Therefore, interpretations that attribute Muhammad to historical *Saoshyant* must be placed in the realm of *spiritual analogy*—not exclusive theology.

Thus, the most powerful approach is the **phenomenological-comparative approach**, which recognizes the similarity of the structure of religious experience without removing the theological autonomy of each religion. In this framework, the figures of Hoshedar and Saoshyant can be understood not merely as Iranian myths, but as universal symbols of the human longing for the final truth that in Islam is manifested in the figure of the Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم.

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